

Cubism – A Paradigm Shift in Western Art.

*** Dr. Neeru Bharti Sharma**

Movement in painting developed by Picasso and Braque from about 1907 and recognized as one of the great turning points in Western art. Cubism made a radical break from the idea of art as the imitation of nature that had dominated European painting and sculpture since the *Renaissance, got Picasso and Braque aimed to be a depict objects as they are known rather than as they appear at a particular moment and place. To this end they broke down the subjects they represented into a multiplicity of facts, rather than showing them from a single, fixed viewpoint, so many different aspects of the same object could be seen simultaneously. The two most important influence on the emergence of Cubism were African sculpture and the later paintings of *Cezanne. Picasso and Braque's work up to 1912 is generally called 'Analytical' Cubism; in this phase of the movement forms were analyzed into predominantly geometrical structures and colour was extremely subdued. In a second phase, known as 'Synthetic Cubism', colour became much stronger and shapes more decorative, and elements such as stenciled lettering and pieces of newspaper were introduced in paintings. Juan *Gris was as important as Braque or Picasso in this phase of the movement. The First World War brought an end to the Collaboration of Braque and Picasso, but their work was immensely

- Assistant Professor in Fine Arts, HMV Jalandhar

influential. Cubism, as well as bring one of the principal sources of abstract art, was infinitely adaptable, giving birth to numerous other movements, among them *Futurism *Orphism *Purism, and *Vorticism.

A term **Cubism** describing a revolutionary style of painting created jointly by *Braque and *Picasso in the period 1907-14 and subsequently applied to a broad movement, centered in Paris but international in scope, in which their ideas were adopted and adapted by many other artist. These artists were mainly painters, but Cubist ideas and motifs were also used in sculpture, and to amore limited and superficial degree in the applied arts and occasionally in architecture . Cubism was complex phenomenon, but in essence it involved what Juan *Gris (its leading exponent apart from the two founders) called ‘a new way of representing the world’. Abandoning the idea of the single fixed viewpoint that had dominated European painting for centuries ,Cubist pictures used a multiplicity of viewpoints , so that many different aspects of an object that could be simultaneously depicted in the same picture. Such fragmentation and rearrangement of form meant that a painting could now be regarded less as a kind of window through which an image of the world is seen, and more as that of a physical object on which a subjective response to the world is created. This new approach proved extraordinarily influential, and John Golding has described Cubism as ‘perhaps the most important and certainly the most complete and radical artistic revolution since the Renaissance’.

Braque and Picasso met 1 October 1907. At this time, Braque had recently been overwhelmed by the memorial exhibition of Cézanne's work at the Salon d'Automne, and Picasso had spent much of the year working on *les Femmes d'Alger* (1907, MoMA, New York), in which the angular and aggressive forms owed much to the influence of African sculpture. These two sources—Cézanne and primitive art—were of a great importance in the genesis of Cubism. Cézanne's late work, with its subtle overlapping patches of colour, showed how a sense of solidity and pictorial structure could exist without traditional perspective or modelling; and primitive art offered an example of expressively distorted forms and freedom from inhibition. The picture to which the term 'Cubism' was applied was a group of landscapes painted by Braque in the summer of 1908, when he was staying at L'Estaque, near Marseilles. They were shown later that year at Kahnweiler's gallery, and in reviewing this exhibition Louis Vauxcelles made reference to Braque's way of reducing 'everything — Sites, figures, and houses — to geometric outlines, to cubes'. The following year Vauxcelles used the expression 'bizarreries cubiques' (cubic eccentricities), and by 1911 the term 'Cubism' had entered the English language. The word is undoubtedly apposite for the block-like forms in some of the Braque landscapes that occasioned Vauxcelles's jibes and in a few similar works by Picasso, but it is not really appropriate to their later Cubist pictures, in which the

forms tend to be broken in facets rather than fashioned into cubes. However, they soon accepted the term as did their followers.

Braque and Picasso' Cubist work is usually divided into two phases- Analytical Cubism (1909-11) and Synthetic Cubism (1912-14). In the 'Analytical phase', the relatively solid massing of that of their earliest Cubist paintings gave way to a process of composition in which the forms of the object depicted are fragmented into the large number of small, intricately hinged planes that fuse with one another and with the surrounding space. This fascination with pictorial structure led to a colour being downplayed, and the archetypal Analytical Cubist paintings are virtually monochromatic, painted in muted browns or warm greys. Examples-showing of how similar the two artists were in style at this date- are Braque's *The Portuguese* (1911, Kunstmuseum, Basle) and Picasso's *The Accordionist* (1911, Guggenheim Mus., New York). At times they worked in asuch close harmony- 'like mountaineers roped together' in Braque's memorable phrase -that even experts can have difficulty in differentiating their hands. In *The Portuguese*, Braque introduced the use of stenciled lettering, and by the following year he was experimenting with mixing materials such as sand and sawdust with his paint to create interesting textures. He refined this notion again by a imitating the effect of wood graining. Later in the same year, 1912, Picasso took this a stage further when he produced his first *collages, and Braque quickly followed with his own type of collage- the papier

colle. These developments- marking a move away from the very cerebral near-abstract of Analytical Cubism to a more relaxed and decorative art incorporating everyday ephemera- ushered in Synthetic cubism. This reversed the compositional principle of Analytical Cubism, the image being built up ('synthesized') from pre-existing elements or process of fragmentation. One consequence of this concern with greater surface richness was that Braque and Picasso reintroduced colour to their paintings. In the Synthetic phase of Cubism, Juan Gris played as important a role as Braque or Picasso, and this time many other artist had been won over to the movement (including Fernard *leger, who is often considered the fourth major Cubist). Indeed, Cubism had become the dominant avant-grade idiom in Paris as early as 1911, *Delaunay, *Gleizes, *LaFresnaye, *Metzinger, and *Picabia being among the adherents by this time.

Cubism proved immensely adaptable and was the starting point or an essential component of several other movement, including *Constructivism, *Futurism, *Orphism, *Purism, and *Vorticism as well as a spur to the imagination of countless individual artist. These included not only painters, but also sculpture, who adapted Cubist ideas in various ways, notably by the opening up of forms so that other leading artists who worked in the idiom include *Arcipenko (whose international success played a great part in spreading Cubist ideas) *Duchamp-Villion, *Laurens, *Lipchitz, and *Zadkine. Another noted

Cubist sculptor was the Czech Otto *Gutfreund, who was part of a remarkable flowering of Cubist art and design in Prague in the years immediately before the First World War, This was the only place where there was a significant adaptation of Cubism to architecture; several Czech architects broke up the facades of their building with abstract, prismatic forms in a way that clearly recalls the fragmentation of Analytical Cubism. In the applied arts, Cubism was one of the sources of *ArtDeco, and more generally it has had a huge and varied impact on modern pictorial culture, becoming part of the common currency of ideas: ‘Cubist painting gave to artist complete freedom to deal with reality in art in any way they chose. A Cubist collage gave them in addition the equally radical freedom to make art out of anything they chose. These developments have been enormously fruitful- they have been and they continue to be the basis of much of the best of modern art’ (Simon Wilson, What is Cubism ?, 1983).